

# Just in Time Parenting

Months 25-26



## Toddlers need patience, humor, and fair rules.

Twos are terrific, tender, trying, taxing, and very, very exciting. As a parent of a 2 year old, these are things you will need this year:

- Patience to cope with your child's mood swings — from very helpful to highly difficult.
- Awareness to see that your child is safe.
- Loving firmness to apply rules in a consistent way so your child can learn to be responsible.
- Humor to laugh at yourself and with your child.
- Wonder to see your toddler as the creative, special person she is.
- Enthusiasm to enjoy and celebrate your toddler's new skills and abilities.

## Thumb sucking is very common for young children.

Thumb sucking is one way a young child comforts herself. If you suddenly stop your child from sucking her thumb or fingers, she may have trouble calming herself. Thumb sucking usually disappears on its own, especially if the child is not pressured to give it up.



Sometimes parents pull thumbs and fingers out of their young children's mouths because they are worried about dental problems. There is little chance of a problem until the child's permanent teeth erupt at 5 or 6 years of age. Even then, there may be no ill effects from thumb sucking every once in awhile.

If you are worried about your child's thumb sucking, keep track of how often she sucks and for how long. Take these notes for several days. This record will help you and your doctor or dentist discuss this and decide what to do.

# What's it like to be 25 - 26 months old?

## How I Grow

- I need 3 small meals and 3 healthy snacks each day.
- I can use a crayon to make scribbles.
- I can use a cup and spoon. Forks may still be hard.
- I am starting to walk and run in straight lines.
- I can jump off the ground with both feet.

## How I Feel

- I like routines – such as the story you read to me and the hug you give me every night at bedtime.
- I get upset when my routines are not followed.
- I feel good that I can do more things by myself.
- I am starting to treat children I know as my friends.
- I really like playing with other kids.
- I am better about being separated from you because now I know you'll come back.
- I can get embarrassed.

## How I Talk

- I say "no" a lot. This shows my independence.
- I like to hear rhymes, but it may be hard for me to say all the words with you.
- I talk more clearly now. Other adults can understand what I say.
- I am starting to use words for positions — like over, under, inside, and outside.
- I am also starting to refer to myself as "I" and others as "you" or "him."

## How I Understand

- I can match an object that is in my hand with a picture of the object.
- I can take turns when playing games.
- I know that there is a right way to do things. I am starting to compare my actions with the "right" way.
- I am starting to put easy puzzles (2 to 3 pieces) together.

**Some children do things earlier or later than described here.**

Most differences are normal. Focus on what your child can do and get excited about each new skill. If you notice that your child is lagging behind in one or more areas for several months, circle the things that your child cannot do. Check the things your child can do. Use this list to talk with your doctor about your child's development.

## Catch health problems early with regular checkups.

Toddlers grow fast. Regular health exams will help the doctor spot problems, and take care of problems early — while they still can be fixed.



If you do not have a doctor for your child, ask your local health department. They can give you the name of a doctor or health department clinic where your child can get a complete exam.

Keep your child's health record in a safe place where you can find it easily. You will need the record when you enroll your child in day care, nursery school, or kindergarten. If your child needs special food or medication while away from home, the health record gives caregivers the correct medical information.

Toddlers should get health checkups at about 12 months, 15 months, 24 months, 36 months — and after age 3, every 2 years. Of course, if parents or doctors have special concerns about the child, exams will be more frequent.

## Prevent cuts and scrapes.

Small children get minor cuts and scrapes often. These happen when children fall, run into things, or step on sharp objects.

- Put shoes on your child when she plays outdoors.
- Close doors to rooms that are not safe and doors that go outside.
- Do not let your child play where there is sharp-edged furniture.
- Do not let your child play where she can climb to high places.

## Help your child learn his first and last name.

- When you are with your child, say his name to him in songs and stories, using his last name, too.
- Make up games where he tells his name. Show him how much you enjoy it when he names himself in photos.

## Hit a pan with a spoon to teach rhythm and coordination.



How to play:

- Show your child how to make different drumming sounds by hitting things with a spoon or a fork. He can hit a pan, a chair, the floor, his shoe, a bottle, and so forth.
- You can take turns leading the game, with each of you hitting one thing after another.
- Try drumming to singing or music, or you can mix fast and slow drumming sounds.

## Praise effort, but don't punish toileting accidents.

Most children become interested in learning to use the toilet on their own. A potty on the floor that the child can use herself helps her to get started. Give her lots of praise for trying and for every success.

Don't scold for accidents. Praise efforts to use the toilet. Most children will stop dirtying before they stop wetting their diapers. Most will be able to stay dry during the day before they can stay dry at night. Many children cannot stay dry at night until they are about 3 years old.

Sometimes children seem to be toilet trained and then they start wetting or soiling again. This can happen when the children are upset about something like a new baby in the family, pressure from adults to stay dry or family stress.

Be patient and caring, and praise successes. Sure, you're eager to be rid of diapers, but if you don't rush toilet training, there will probably be less stress on everyone. Don't start toilet training until your toddler shows she wants to use the toilet. Then it should go quickly and smoothly.

Toilet training should not be upsetting to parents or their children. If it is, wait a few weeks and try again.

## Teach colors with homemade materials.

### **You will need:**

- Sheet of cardboard
- Five sheets of different colored paper
- Pencil
- Drinking glass
- Scissors
- Child safe glue  
*Check the bottle to be sure it says nontoxic or child safe.*



### **To make the game:**

- Make circles by drawing around a water glass on the colored paper. Make two circles of each color of paper. You will have 5 pairs of circles, each pair a different color.
- Cut out all of the circles; stack them in two separate piles.
- Glue one set of circles to the cardboard.

### **How to play:**

- Place the cardboard in front of your child on the floor, or at a table.
- One by one, give her different colored circles. Ask her to put each one on the same colored circle glued to the cardboard.
- Say the name of the color as your child puts each circle on the correct color.
- When all the circles have been matched, have your child pick up the circles one by one and hand them back to you. Ask her the color of each circle as she hands it back to you.

## Beware of high sugar cereals.

Has this happened to you yet? You are pushing your grocery cart down the aisle of the supermarket. All of a sudden, your toddler sees a certain brand of cereal. He begins calling out the name of the cereal. He wants you to buy it. You are amazed. You've never bought this cereal, and he's never eaten it. How did he find out about it? He probably learned about it from television.

Toddlers don't seem to pay much attention to television, but they are often aware of what is happening on the screen. Commercials are very appealing because of the action and the noise. The food most often advertised during children's television programs is cereal. Some of these cereals are nutritious, others are not. In fact, some of these cereals have more

sugar than cereal in them. They are more like candy than cereal.

How can you tell if a cereal is high in sugar? Look for the list of ingredients on the cereal box. They are listed in order of amounts. The first ingredient has the largest amount in the cereal. The last ingredient has the smallest amount in the cereal. If the first ingredient in the list is sugar, there is more sugar in the cereal than anything else. You will want to choose another cereal lower in sugar.

What do you tell your child when you decide not to buy the cereal? Say, "This is not a 'good-for-you' cereal. We want to buy a 'good-for-you' cereal to help you grow healthy and strong." Check labels on other cereals and let him choose from the cereals that are low in sugar. If your child is unhappy



because you aren't going to buy the cereal he wants, move away from the cereal display.

Go on and do the rest of your shopping. You can spend time reading cereal labels when you are shopping alone.



### Parents of capable toddlers:

- Encourage their children to help with household chores.
- Read to their children daily.
- Have regular family routines (like mealtimes).
- Encourage their children to help with household chores.
- Allow their children to do some messy things, such as washing dishes.
- Choose programs carefully, then limit and supervise their children's television viewing.
- Observe their children closely to keep them safe — and to fit activities to their child's developing skills.
- Have firm, consistent rules and give children reasons for these rules.
- Teach their children and actively help them learn.
- Play with their children frequently — including pretend play.

## Match activities to development and set rules with reasons.

## Exercises — like deep breathing and shoulder rolls — relieve stress.

Stress can make your body feel bad. Over the long term, stress can cause real damage. Over the short term, you may feel headaches, tight muscles, backaches, or a stiff neck.

Sometimes stress makes us breathe poorly, and we don't get enough oxygen. Deep breathing can make you feel better, and it can give you a "time-out" to help you handle whatever is causing the stress.

- Close your eyes and sit up straight. Breathe in, slowly and deeply.
- Count silently to two — hold the air in for another count — then let the air out slowly.



- Repeat this slow, deep breathing for 5 to 10 minutes if you can. You will be more relaxed when you finish.

When your muscles are sore but you don't have time to go swimming or walking, try these exercises wherever you are.

- Try to raise your shoulders up to your ears. Hold for a few seconds, and then drop your shoulders back down. Repeat a few times.
- Try rotating your shoulders around, one at a time, then together.
- With your shoulders relaxed, move your head slowly from side to side. Make sure to keep breathing deeply while you exercise.

## Teach your child new words.

Parents can help toddlers learn new words by:

- Repeating the names of things over and over again, using simple words and short sentences. Tell your child what you are doing and what your child is doing. Don't use baby talk.
- Letting your child get things for you. Name what you want and ask your child to go to other rooms to find it.
- Going for walks and taking along a bag to collect leaves, rocks, flowers, and/or pieces of wood. When you get back home, look at these and name them.

You can play this learning game another way:

- Choose some things she might enjoy feeling, and put them in the bag. Examples would be a smooth rock, a rough rock, a piece of wood, a small stuffed animal, some pieces of cloth, a feather, and so on.

- Be sure the things you put in the bag are not sharp or dangerous.
- Close the top of the bag, leaving a hole just big enough for the child's hand. Ask your toddler to reach in and find something.
- Ask your child to guess what she is touching — without looking or pulling it out of the bag. If she can't figure it out let her peek.
- Ask her what she has found and help her learn to say, "I found a rock" or "I found a leaf."
- You can take turns reaching in the bag and guessing what you've found.
- This is a good game for two or three to play together. Your toddler can help you change the game by putting different things in the bag.

## Toddlers need fruits and vegetables in their daily diet.

Active toddlers need 3 meals and 3 snacks every day. For more information on feeding your child healthful food, read My Pyramid for Preschoolers Age 2-5 [www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/index.html](http://www.mypyramid.gov/preschoolers/index.html)

He should also be drinking plenty of low-sugar liquids — like water, 100% juice, or low-fat (1% or 2%) milk. If you are still serving your toddler whole milk, now is the time to start switching to low-fat (1% or 2%) milk. It offers the same nutrition benefits and vitamins without the extra fat that was needed last year.

Toddlers learn a lot by watching adults. They often imitate what they see, and want to do the things they see parents and other adults doing. This is true of eating. If parents eat healthy foods, children are more likely to eat healthy foods too. You can help teach your child good eating habits by eating healthy foods — like fruits and vegetables — with your child.

## Substitute helpful comments for criticism and put-downs.

We all want our children to grow up feeling they are capable and lovable. One of the trickiest and most important skills parents must learn is guiding their children in ways that control naughty behavior and help their children learn to do what's right. This is hard to do when you are angry or upset because your child is causing a problem. It takes a lot of practice and patience at these times not to be critical or accusing.

Children who hear “put downs” can come to feel hopeless, and may stop trying to cooperate. When your child misbehaves, she needs “help-outs” instead of “put-downs.” “Help-outs” make her feel you love her and you know she can learn to do better. “Putdowns” do just the opposite.

### Here are some “help-outs”:

- Here's a sponge. I'll help you clean it up.
- That's hard to do. Let me do it with you.
- I'm proud of you for trying that. Hold it with both hands next time and it may not fall.
- That is a dangerous thing to do. You could fall. Let me hold your hand.

### Avoid “put-downs” like:

- I knew that would happen if I let you do it alone.
- Can't you do anything right?
- You're being a brat.
- Why do you always drop things?
- You never pick up your clothes.
- Won't you ever learn?
- Can't you see that's dangerous?

Listen to yourself. Try to use “help-outs” — not “put-downs.”



# Bedtime routines help toddlers sleep better.

Toddlers need regular bedtimes and special bedtime routines — like teeth cleaning, stories, and hugs. Parents need regular bedtimes for their children, so that they can have some time to relax.

Bedtime is not always sleep time. By following a routine, you can help your toddler learn to go to bed and be quiet at set times.

Don't worry if she does not always go to sleep as soon as she goes to bed. Sometimes toddlers need some time to wind down and relax before they get sleepy.

Try doing something relaxing before bedtime with your toddler — like reading a book or rocking. Rough-housing and watching TV before bed can make it hard for children to go to sleep. Try to do the same things every evening before putting your toddler to bed. If she still is not sleepy after the bedtime routine, let her play quietly in bed, or look at a picture book, until sleep comes.

## Want to learn more?

For more parenting info and updated links, visit [www.extension.org/parenting](http://www.extension.org/parenting).

If you have questions, contact your local Extension office.

This newsletter gives equal space to both sexes. If he or she is used, we are talking about all children.

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